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RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0016

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DEPT FOR AF/PPD WHARTON, KEMP, STRASSBERGER  
IIP MURPHY, DOMOWITZ  
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SUBJECT: Kenya's Media: Part IV - Role of the Media and New Trends

REF: NAIROBI 2640; NAIROBI 2646; NAIROBI 2656

1. (U) Summary. This is the last part of a four-part report on the state of the Kenyan Media. The parts are: 1) Overview and the new media law; 2) Radio Stations; 3) Media Houses and Cross Ownership; and 4) Role of the media and New Trends. The rapid growth of media outlets in Kenya has set a new trend in motion: competition for talented journalists who can deliver locality-specific, region-specific content that makes stations stand out. A few large media houses have compensated for the dearth of qualified journalists with more focused training, while others have engaged in a recruiting war. Mobile phone and Internet-based media is on the rise while digitalization is set to be completed by 2012. Some in the Kenyan media, instead of playing a constructive role for the country at a crossroads, foment political acrimony and tribalism. Kenyan civil society leaders have called for constructive and dynamic media engagement that would help Kenya's reform efforts. End summary.

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Winning Content  
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2. (SBU) The word is out: it does not take much to start a radio station. A small room with minimal equipment manned by 2-3 "journalists" is sufficient. An increasing number of stations are fighting for limited advertisement resources. Kiprono Kittony, Chairman of Radio Africa told us he believes that the market is unhealthily fragmented, with too many media outlets fighting for limited advertising resources, which total USD 270 million annually. Media owners understand well that in the end, it is the content that will secure a market share.

3. (U) The crowded market means that each outlet needs to find its own niche through content that sets it apart from others and that is produced and delivered by qualified journalists. The increasingly competitive market and limited number of qualified journalists have set off a war for talent and more regionalization of content as each station searches for a niche. Nation Media, for example, each year trains twenty young professionals which it recruits throughout East Africa, with a goal of establishing a cadre of elite journalists. Popular anchors have been the objects

of a bidding war. Not long after Capital FM's morning talk show duo interviewed visiting Secretary of State Clinton, they were recruited by the Radio Africa Group to its start-up station, X FM.

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Too Easy to Become Journalist?  
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14. (U) Without exception, all media owners cited the poor quality of Kenyan journalists as one of the obstacles to modernizing the Kenyan media. The majority of Kenyan journalists have been educated in two schools of journalism. The School of Journalism at the University of Nairobi began offering a full-fledged degree course five years ago; until then it offered a specialized journalism curriculum with no degree. The Government-owned Kenya Institute of Mass Communications (KIMC) was originally designed to provide "media experts" to the Ministry of Information. It later expanded its curriculum.

15. (U) Lately, other universities such as the USIU, Daystar, Moi and Egerton universities have launched journalism departments of their own. There are many small journalistic training centers in Kenya's urban centers, which provide cheap and quick courses for those who want to join the media with a minimum of training. Unfortunately, even fully-accredited institutions lack basic facilities. Many see a direct connection between the lack of professional training and sub-standard delivery of the multitude of FM stations, particularly the vernacular ones.

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Going Mobile  
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16. (U) Lack of access to the Internet has been hindering the spread of any new media in Kenya. Blogging, facebook and other new media have been slow to develop. Major daily newspapers all sponsor blogs but entries tend to feature letters to the editor; they do not serve as a forum for discussion and engagement. Most popular and relatively well-maintained blogs are rafiki-kenya.blogspot.com; bankelele.blogspot.com; afromusing.com; kenyagayouth.blogspot.com; kenyapoet.blogspot.com and ushahidi.com. One breakthrough has been the distribution of media postings via mobile telephone. In an arrangement with Safaricom, a leading telecommunications company in Kenya, VOA provides daily, updated audio and video stories to cell phone subscribers. Approximately ten million Kenyans subscribe to the Safaricom service. The Nation Media Group has a similar arrangement with Zain, another telecom company. Most radio talk shows take sms questions from their listeners.

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Digitalization  
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17. (U) Test runs for digital broadcasting in Kenya began in October this year, prompting a rush to buy "digital ready" television sets. The Kenyan government has announced the year 2012 as the deadline for migration from analogue broadcasting to digital, three years ahead of the global deadline of June 2015. To

facilitate the migration, the government has formed and designated a company, Signet, as the signal distributor. Signet is a subsidiary of the national broadcaster, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). A committee -- the Digital Television Committee (DTC) -- has been formed to spearhead the migration to digital. Having a single signal distributor means that media houses will no longer need to maintain their transmitters countrywide to reach consumers. Instead, they will feed programs to the channels they are licensed to own. Under this arrangement, the Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) will still be responsible for licensing, while broadcasters will be required to sign a separate contract with Signet for transmission.

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Role to Play  
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¶8. (SBU) Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, during his October visit to Kenya, chided media leaders for "sleeping on the job." David Waweru, Managing Director of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), who was present at the meeting, told us that Annan believed that the Kenyan media is not playing the vital role

it should in the reform process. Annan alleged that, instead of providing the public with necessary information, the media politicized each step and even intentionally published misinformation. Waweru disagreed, telling us that the media managed to keep pressure on the political elite by endlessly highlighting the still largely unfulfilled reform agenda.

¶9. (SBU) Shelia Amdany, Executive Secretary of the Media Owners' Association, was less positive. According to her, Kenyan journalism is characterized by "political acrimony and tribalism." As a result, "there is so much negative energy in the media." It is a well-documented fact that many media outlets openly sided with political and tribal factions during the 2007 post election turmoil. Chris Odwesso, Editor-in-Chief of the Kenya Times, summed up, saying, "The media abhor tribalism in theory but embrace it in practice." Some media outlets actively reach out to the Kenyan Diaspora to mobilize the tribal groups behind their preferred political factions. A Kalenjin station, KASS FM, conducts interactive programs regularly between Kenya-based and U.S.-based Kalenjins.

¶10. (SBU) According to Suzanne Gachukia, a young owner of Sub Sahara Communications Company, Kenya is experiencing a crisis of confidence after the shocking events of 2007 post-election violence. As an institution still considered credible by most Kenyans, the media has a serious role to play in "catalyzing" the reform process. David Waweru agreed, saying that instead of searching for sensational headlines, the media should be educating the general populace about concrete reform steps. He cited the example of the reappointment of Aaron Ringera as the head of the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission. From the reappointment to his resignation, all major media relentlessly focused on the personalities involved, instead of the Commission's importance and role in Kenya's future. Irungu Ndirangu, Editor-in-Chief of the People's Daily, cited the dispute about possible International Criminal Court (ICC) intervention in the cases of the perpetrators of the 2007 post-election violence. The media rarely covered the information about what the ICC option entailed and its implications for Kenya, he said. As a result, to this day, few Kenyans understand the significance of possible ICC intervention.

¶11. (SBU) During a November 17 National Youth Forum, leaders of youth movements criticized the media for not covering the

grassroots activism that was quietly changing the country's political landscape. They said that the media is often co-opted by politicians who are threatened by reform-oriented youth groups, and refuse to cover activist events. Esther Kamweru, Deputy Director of the Media Council, observed that "when the media and government come together, people suffer." Rose Kimotho agreed, saying, "The non-holy alliance between the media and politicians must go." "The suspicious nature of the Kenyan people and a divided civil society make an impartial media all the more important," affirmed Irungu Ndirangu. He noted that the unveiling of a draft constitution on November 17 offered the media yet another chance to play a pivotal role in defining the issues at stake during the debate that will precede that adoption of a new constitution.

¶12. (SBU) There is a new refreshing movement to create a different type of media which will be more in touch with ordinary Kenyans and the country's need for change. In mid-December, the Center for Rights, Education and Awareness (CREAW), a women's rights organization, and Africa Community Development Media (ADCM), an organization focused on the media's role for social transformation, launched a new Internet-based radio station. According to ADCM's representative Anne Njogu, when a year-long negotiation with the Communication Commission of Kenya for a frequency failed, ADCM decided to turn to the Internet. The station's sole focus for the next several months, under the title of "Katiba ni yako" (the Constitution is yours), will be Kenya's draft constitution as part of an effort to ensure that ordinary Kenyans are informed about what is at stake. After the planned referendum in April, the station will focus consecutively on each urgent topic of the reform

agenda, including reconciliation, land reform and judicial reform. ADCM is fully aware of the shortcomings of an Internet-based radio, like limited access, and plans to supplement its operation with mobile phone messages and eventually go digital. Anne Njogu is confident that ordinary Kenyans' yearning for a media that is truly focused on their concerns will succeed.

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Comment  
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¶13. (SBU) The media environment in Kenya is highly competitive, and print and electronic journalism continue to play a key role in the national discussion of the critical issues that confront the country. Unfortunately, the highly partisan and tribal nature of much of the media too often lead to a focus on personalities, scandal, and rumor, instead of a more dispassionate discussion of the serious issues that Kenya must successfully resolve if it is to remain the keystone country of East Africa. The proliferation of media is a double-edged sword: it offers Kenyans more sources of information about the issues of the day, but also potentially further divides the Kenyan audience along tribal, geographical, and political lines. The Mission has a range of programs aimed at increasing professionalization of the media.

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